

Congressman Silvestre Reyes
Introduction of Homeland Security Panel
A Joint Democratic Forum on the Impact of the Federal Budget on Families
Austin, Texas

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In this Homeland Security panel we will hear from two people who are on the frontline of our nation's defense. They are responsible for the security of our ports of entry, and therefore our nation as a whole. In this era of heightened homeland security, these individuals are not only faced with increased responsibilities, but also with increased danger. Unfortunately, the fiscal year 2006 federal budget does not give them the resources they need to carry out their jobs effectively and safely.

As a 26 ½ year veteran of the U.S. Border Patrol, including 13 years as Chief of the El Paso and McAllen sectors, I understand the challenges facing these men and women. I know about the toll that unfunded mandates take on their day-to-day operations and their overall ability to safeguard our country. Stretching our dedicated border security personnel undermines our nation's homeland security mission and could place America in great danger.

The fiscal year 2006 budget provides for the hiring of only 210 Border Patrol agents. This number is significantly less than the 2,000 per year included in last year's intelligence reform bill and much less than the 1,000 agents I think the Border Patrol can effectively absorb annually. At a time when we're told that the nation continues to be at risk, the passage of the fiscal year 2006 federal budget resolution was extremely irresponsible. The Administration and my colleagues in the House of Representatives who voted for this budget are seriously underestimating the needs of America's first line of defense.

Thank you to our Homeland Security panelists – and to all our panelists – for traveling here today to share your stories with us. Your expert opinions and firsthand knowledge will shine a light on the failures of the proposed fiscal year 2006 federal budget and help us lead the charge for a budget that will address our border security needs, and all of the urgent needs of the American people.